

Citation for published version:

Tran, H, Baruch, Y & Bui, H 2019, 'On the way to self-employment: The dynamics of career mobility', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, pp. 1-26.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1640267>

DOI:

[10.1080/09585192.2019.1640267](https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1640267)

Publication date:

2019

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in The International Journal of Human Resource Management on 24 July 2019, available online:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/09585192.2019.1640267>

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ON THE WAY TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT: THE DYNAMICS OF CAREER MOBILITY

Abstract

This qualitative study offers empirically-based explanations of the dynamics of career mobility trajectories to self-employment, a popular phenomenon in real life but less so in the literature. Embedded in the career ecosystem of an emerging-economy country, we investigate the mobility dynamics of people in different stages of their self-employment career. We conducted in-depth interviews with 35 individuals who opted for entrepreneurship or self-employed careers, and deploy the interpretive phenomenology to explore the dynamics of career mobility of self-employment. The results demonstrate different patterns of mobility between self- and paid employment during individuals' career sequences. The different push and pull forces that influence mobility are identified and explained. The study advances the theories of career and entrepreneurship literature by not only illustrating the mobility dynamics of self-employment as a stage of one's career but by also exploring the dynamic mechanisms of the mobility, drawing on the career ecosystem framework.

Keywords: career mobility; self-employment; paid employment; career ecosystem; push-pull factors

Introduction

Career mobility has become increasingly prevalent in the contemporary career and entrepreneurship context (Baluku, Löser, Otto and Schummer 2018) because it allows employees to enhance their skills and abilities to improve their employability, and contributes to individual career success (Chudzikowski 2012). Career mobility is defined as any transition from one position to another (Forrier, Sels and Stynen 2009) and can be understood as a trajectory from the past to the future (Burton, Sorensen and Dobrev 2016). Internal mobility is more often used by organizations as a developmental reward, an alternative to financial benefits (Chudzikowski 2012).

Nevertheless, the complexity of career mobility and its determinants is not comprehensively explained (Forrier et al. 2009). For example, while many studies have explicated different types of career mobility, attention to self-employment mobility has been sparse (Burton et al. 2016). In contrast, a significantly large share of the workforce in many countries, particularly in developing countries, is accounted for by self-employment (Gindling and Newhouse 2014; Nikolaev, Shir and Wiklund 2019). Additionally, this segment of the labor markets is predicted to grow because of the promotion of entrepreneurship in many regions of the world (Hsiao, Lee and Chen 2016). Also, career mobility should involve a series of different steps embedded in one's career history (Burton et al. 2016), but research seems to have encountered difficulties in tracking the mobility (Feldman and Ng 2007). Thus, there is a need to keep track of the dynamics of self-employment mobility, particularly in emerging contexts, in order to better understand the reality of a large labor force, and develop suitable theories to explain the dynamism of self-employment mobility.

In this paper, we explore multiple patterns of self-employment mobility and specify the approaches that different forces of self-employment contribute to the balance and dynamics of such mobility following the ideas of the career-ecosystem framework (Baruch 2015). Applying an interpretive phenomenology with 35 in-depth interviews with participants at different stages of their self-employment career, we present a new model of mobility dynamics of self-employment by illustrating mobility trajectories of self-employed people. We also demonstrate the pull forces of individual determinants (self-employment motivation, calling, and career self-management) and mixed effects of institutions and society on such mobility. We conducted this study in a very distinctive context of Vietnam where a prevailing trend of smaller start-up has brought self-employment mobility to public attention in the globalization of the labor market.

By responding to the above concerns, our study makes three major contributions to existing career literature. First, we advance the literature of self-employment mobility by capturing steps that self-employed participants follow to navigate their career. Second, by tracking mobility trajectories of those participants, we also establish the dynamic connections between self-employment and paid employment to show how people are pushed and pulled towards psychological self-employment mobility. Last but not least, based on the career ecosystem framework, we visualize a model of self-employment mobility, illustrating the synthesized forces of individual, institutional and societal actors. This contribution extends the contemporary literature on career ownership (Baruch 2015; Baruch and Rousseau 2019). All these contributions will help HR scholar and HR practitioners as well as individuals to better understand psychological self-employment mobility.

Respective roles of both individuals and institutions in career development

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The so-called ‘new careers’ (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle 1999) suggest that individuals are more likely to take charge of and self-direct their careers, more often than not outside the traditional organizational system (Hall 2002; Arthur 2014). Specifically, because of restructuring, downsizing and delayering pressures, ‘career’ is no longer merely attached to organizations; instead, individuals manage their own career within the organization and other social domains (Hytti 2010; Baruch 2014). The consequences for careers, however, are double-edged; for example, some people may be pulled to career self-management while others are pushed to self-survival, reflecting the coexistence of the bright and dark sides of career (Baruch and Vardi 2016). Self-employment, hence, becomes an alternative to employment as a means to moderate risk and secure employment (Hytti 2005).

It was not until recently that the dynamics of career mobility between self- and paid employment raised some academic concerns (Burton et al. 2016). For example, Marshall and Gigliotti (2018) examined pre-start-up experiences at existing organizations and found them to be determinants of entrepreneurship intention. More comprehensively, Hunter (2005) examined five stages of entrepreneurial career: preparation, embarkation, exploration, expansion and transformation. During these stages, entrepreneurship failure is regarded as a critical learning curve in the career life of entrepreneurship (Hunter 2005). These examples manifest issues in both career and entrepreneurship literature, which can be addressed by exploring multiple pathways, when people move between paid and self-employment on their way to self-employment.

Career mobility should involve a series of different steps embedded in one’s career history (Burton et al. 2016), but previous research encountered difficulties in tracking the mobility (Feldman and Ng 2007). Entrepreneurship scholars also identify a need to learn the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ sides of entrepreneurship decisions from both personal career history of entrepreneurs and the wider employment context (Hytti 2010; Patterson and Mavin 2009). The

literature is scant on why individuals opt for entrepreneurship or self-employment career. Therefore, integrated, multi-level and multidisciplinary efforts are required to provide multi-perspective explanations for the dynamics of career mobility (Baruch and Rousseau 2019), particularly self-employment mobility (Chudzikowski 2012).

Career ecosystem as a framework for exploring self-employment mobility

The career ecosystem concept (Baruch 2015) suggests that individual career actors tend to reflect one of three scenarios: actively pursuing their self-employment; developing their career within organizations; or neglecting their career management. Regarding career mobility, the career ecosystem concept explains its mechanism as a process of matching needs and requirements with supply and demand across the three main career actors – individuals, institutions, and societies. In a career ecosystem, individuals bring their needs, traits, values, attitudes and human capital to the system (Baruch 2015). They plan, learn, train, negotiate, network, perform and progress to achieve their intended outcomes. Similarly, institutions have culture, resources, structure and means for planning, supporting, inspiring, monitoring, training and negotiating. Likewise, society creates laws, regulates, and sets norms via its culture, values, education, legislation and professional associations. All these activities impose push (alienatedness) and pull (attractiveness) forces which construct a sustainable socio-economic balance in a career system (De Vos and Van der Heijden 2015).

Entrepreneurship scholars also highlight the need to learn the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ sides of entrepreneurship decisions from the perspectives of both personal career history of entrepreneurs and the larger employment context (Dawson and Henley, 2012; Hytti 2010; Patterson and Mavin 2009). Particularly, some people become self-employed because they cannot secure appropriate paid jobs. By contrast, others choose self-employment because of their self-efficacy and the availability of favorable conditions at the time (Dawson and

Henley 2012). Underlying the spectrum is the interaction between external environment and human agency (Shane, Locke and Collins 2003). Such interaction, interdependence and interrelatedness between individuals and their context are systematically discussed in the career ecosystem framework (Baruch 2015; Baruch and Rousseau 2019). Based this framework, we explore the dynamics of self-employment mobility. Given the heterogeneous nature of self-employment, we focus on people who positively manage their pathways to self-employment. To comprehensively understand the dynamics of their mobility, we respectively address two research questions: (1) What are typical patterns of career mobility at specific stages of self-employment? and (2) What factors contribute to the self-employment mobility?

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Methodology

Vietnam was chosen for this study for several crucial reasons. First, this Southeast Asian economy has witnessed remarkable structural reform efforts as one of the most dynamic economies in the world (REO: Regional Economic Outlook 2018, International Monetary Fund (IMF)). The impressive economic growth resulted in the swift movement in the labor market (Do and Duchêne 2008). Second, self-employment plays a significant role in Vietnam's career ecosystem. Particularly, according to Cling, Razafindrakito and Rouband (2017), domestic enterprise and formal household businesses account for more than 15% of the country's employment, outweighing both public sector employment (9.7%) and the foreign sector (2.9%). A significant ratio of these domestic entrepreneurs and business-owners also undertakes paid employment (Do and Duchêne 2008). Such a dynamic environment provides rich insights into contemporary career dynamics (Bloch 2005).

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Sampling and data collection

The majority of self-employed careerists in developing countries are either borne out of necessity or driven by autonomy and flexibility needs (Gindling and Newhouse 2014). We include people at different career stages: those who are (a) preparing for their self-employment; (b) in the early stage of their self-employment; (c) performing both self- and paid employment; and (d) established in their self-employment. We do not include expansion and transformation stages of self-employment. Correspondingly, this study aims to reach nascent, new, established, and hybrid self-employment careerists. *Nascent self-employment* may refer either to people who are preparing for their independent business (Hayek 2012) or people who have run their business for less than three months. Those who run their business from three months to three and a half years are considered as *new self-employment*. Those who run their business for more than that were labeled *established self-employment* (Bosma, Coduras, Litovsky and Seaman, 2012). *Hybrid self-employment* refers to people who perform both self- and paid employment simultaneously (Folta, Delmar and Wennberg 2010). Given that survival is critical to any business, we associate nascent and new self-employment with *trial stages*. Thus, we combine and re-label them as *trial self-employment*. As both *hybrid* and *established self-employment* have operated for a sufficient period of time, we link them to the *established stage* but keep them separate because of their distinctive features. Hence, in the following sections, we explain the dynamics of career mobility of the three main self-employment groups: *trial self-employment*, *hybrid employment* and *established self-employment*.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the career narratives of participants, aiming towards data saturation (O'Reilly and Parker 2013). While theoretical saturation of the grounded theory approach focusses on the point where categories are fully considered, data/theme saturation of other qualitative approaches concentrates on the point where no new knowledge emerges (O'Reilly and Parker 2013). The data saturation was apparent after 30

interviews. Eventually, 35 interviews were collected, of which 14 were conducted with *trial* self-employment, 14 with *established* self-employment and seven with *hybrid* self-employment. These numbers correspond well with the recommendation for phenomenology research (Creswell and Poth 2018). This sample size is considered very good and above the norm in management qualitative studies, according to Saunders and Townsend (2016).

Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Among the participants, 18 were under 30, 10 were in their 30s and seven were in their 40s. Gender distribution was 13 female and 22 male. The majority (31) had higher education degrees; there were three vocational degrees, and one non-degree. Interview questions were developed mainly to learn what the participants have experienced in terms of career mobility and what and how contexts or situations have typically influenced their mobility experience (Moustakas 1994).

Interpretive phenomenology

Aligned with recent discussions about the relevance of social constructionism to career study (Cohen, Duberley and Mallon 2004; Patton and McMahon 2014; Wolf 2019) and entrepreneurship study (Ramoglou and Tsang 2016), we deploy the interpretive phenomenology to explore the dynamics of career mobility of self-employment. Among various qualitative research methods, phenomenology has the strongest emphasis on examining and interpreting lived experience (Lopez and Willis 2004). We opted for interpretive phenomenology because it is suitable for exploring our research questions (Conroy 2003). Interpretive phenomenologists explore individuals' interpretations of being-in-the-world and how the interpretation drives their decision making (Lopez and Willis 2004).

Analysis techniques

Under the phenomenology approach, data analysis generally uses ‘significant statement’ as the narrow unit of analysis to build a broader unit and then produces a rich description of ‘what’ and ‘how’ aspects of the phenomenon (Creswell and Poth 2018). In this study, we not only explore the dynamics of the mobility of self-employment but also aim to discover different internal and external push-pull forces causing the dynamics of career mobility. To achieve this, we adopted a concurrent process of data collection and analysis. Interview transcripts were coded in parallel by two different people to reduce possible bias (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis 2016). For example, after identifying potential determinants of career mobility such as career goal, each type of goal was classified into *enabler* or *barrier*. Comparison between the two coders showed 75% of similarity. At the end of each stage, the coding practices, data-theory linkage and what should be done in the next stage were discussed. NVivo software was utilized for the data analysis (Edhlund and McDougall 2016), and the codebook of fundamental terms is summarized in Table 1.

 Insert Table 1 here

Analysis and findings

The narratives of most participants implied that their inner voice pulls them to self-employment. In other words, motivation and calling encouraged them to pursue this path. The *motivation* was specified as autonomy, financial reward, making product(s), business development, and creating social wealth. *Calling* was expressed as occupational calling – passion for a particular occupation, and entrepreneurial calling – passion for making money and doing business. These inner voices seemed to compel people to engage in career self-management through learning, capital mobilization, problem-solving, networking and

operation, and self-direction, which in turn accelerated the pull effects on their career mobility.

For self-employment respondents, institution environment may refer to both home and host institutions. *Home* institution is an organization in which they put their effort to create, cultivate, manage and develop. *Host* institution is an organization in which they pursue their paid employment and accumulate sufficient knowledge and experience for their start-up. Apart from intended self-employment and graduate start-ups, all other participants had experience of both home and host institution environments where they encountered different situations in which home and host institutions could pull (attractive) or push (alienate) self-employment mobility. Specific exemplifications of these forces are demonstrated in Table 2. The interactions, interrelatedness and inter-correlations among these forces drive different pull and push mobility as above-mentioned. Our analysis shows that most of the participants, excluding participant 20, were *pulled* to self-employment.

Insert Table 2 here

The following part presents the analysis and interpretations of three types of self-employment – namely, trial self-employment, hybrid self-employment, and established self-employment. The analysis helps to identify all pull and push forces in order for us to develop a model of career mobility of self-employment within the ecosystem.

Trial self-employment

The trial self-employment group comprises 14 participants. While two were in business less than three years, the other 12 were preparing for their future self-employment. For example, participant 11 (male, thirties, several months of self-employment) illustrated new self-

employment transitioning from paid to self-employment status. This participant described different steps including moving *between* organizations and then moving *to* self-employment. Such mobility was a result of push factors (tough working conditions, low income, person-institution dis-congruence) and pull factors (occupational calling, self-employment motivation). Figure 1a illustrates the mobility track of participant 11. Below are narratives from this participant about his career trajectory.

Step 1 ...My first employment was at a state-owned company. Being a technician, I had nothing to do. I only observed what the floor workers performed, and felt bored. I requested to work as a floor worker. Hardship job, low income, stress, and worries made me exhausted and ended with me being hospitalized. During my time in hospital, I read a book called 'Getting rich your own way'. I realized that money came from sales. I changed my mind and read other books relating to sales. My passion for sales arose and I left the state-owned company.

I tried to apply for sales positions for months but did not succeed. Later on, one company called and offered me a service consultant job. I thought that if I could not be a sales consultant immediately, a service consultant might be a good transition. Hence, I performed the job for three years. Being awarded as the best consultant, I was offered a holiday in Singapore. I recalled my sales goal. I, then, asked my manager to transfer me to the sales department. He refused and I left. It was my emotional decision because I did not have any job alternative at that time.

Step 2 ... I have attended several courses, networked with many successful and wealthy people. I realize that to be rich, we should work for ourselves, not for others. By the end of this month, I will resign and set up a commercial website to sell many products, not only cars.

 Insert Figure 1a here

For participants who intend to follow self-employment, the dynamics of mobility are shown by the mobility patterns of participants 5, 16, and 21. Participant 5 (male, twenties, two years of self-employment) experienced multiple status transitions from self- to paid employment, and from paid to self-employment. Steps toward self-employment included physically inward paid employment mobility, inter-organization mobility, and planned self-employment mobility. The mobility varied from physical to psychological mobility, and from

pushed to pulled mobility. Such mobility was driven by person-environment misfit (push factor) and host-organization attractiveness or career self-management (pull factors). Figure 1b illustrates the mobility track of participant 5. Below are narratives from this participant about his career trajectory.

- Step 1* My initial plan was to develop a franchised chain of coffee shops. However, I realized that I did not have sufficient operational knowledge such as cost saving or necessary relationships to fulfill my plan. Moreover, I felt the business was not as promising as I had thought. Then, I applied to work for this consumer goods company.
- Step 2* This company has helped me to build my personal brand, which is a big competitive advantage compared to those who do not. In addition, having experience here is highly recommended by people within this industry. However, I am planning to move to another company in the agricultural industry.
- Step 3* ...as my family has farming land in the countryside and I hope to start up in agriculture.

Insert Figure 1b here

Both participants 16 and 21 experienced psychological pulling from paid to self-employment transitions due to self-determination (pull) and misfit with current institution (pushed). However, while participant 16 was involved in pushed and pulled inter-organization mobility, participant 21 was not. Figure 1c illustrates the mobility track of participant 16 (female, forties, zero year of self-employment). Below is a narrative from this participant about her career trajectory.

- Step 1* My first job was as a construction accountant. I did that job for two months then moved to a hotel. I worked as a cashier for different hotels earning an income 4-5 times higher than in the accountant job. I had a year's break for my first childbirth. Then I worked as a cashier at a school for 3-4 years before I had my second child. At that age, I worked as an accountant for an advertising company for three years. I have worked for this estate company since 2008. My company buys failing projects, revives them, and then sells them on. I also invest in real estate.
- Step 2* I plan to stop being employed at the age of 50, and will run my own business.

Insert Figure 1c here

Figure 1d illustrates the mobility track of participant 21 (female, twenties, zero year of self-employment). Below is a narrative from this participant about her career trajectory.

If I were able to choose, I would not have taken on this job. I still work here because the job is stable in terms of time and income. I can also spend time taking care of my small child and preparing for my business intention.

Insert Figure 1d here

Overall, the mobility of this group is a combination of self-employment motivation, calling, self-career management, and institutional and societal factors. Trial participants reflected autonomy, finance and business development as motivations for their career mobility. Occupational calling is indicated as a pull factor of their self-employment, motivating one to master and manage their own career in the occupation they have chosen. Host organizations' characteristics also have pull-push impacts on self-employment careers of participants; for example, misfit with current organization causes people to find a better place to work or to set up their own business. Conversely, organizations with favorable financial and developmental rewards attract people. Societal factors such as market, family, and friends also affect the mobility in different ways; in particular, the tough market conditions or the emerging opportunities are push and pull forces generated from within the market. Similarly, family resources and childcare responsibilities are family-driven pull and push factors, and support from friends is another social pull influence. Finally, the participants reported that career self-management practices such as learning, capital mobilization, networking and problem-solving push them forward to their self-employment career.

Hybrid self-employment

The hybrid self-employment group consists of nine participants who engaged in both paid employment and self-employment. Given the characteristics of these respondents, all of them manifested multi-directional mobility. For example, participant 32 (male, thirties, more than 3.5 years of self-employment) was pulled to move from organization to organization; and from just paid employment to self-employment and paid employment. Figure 2a illustrates his mobility track. Below are his narratives about his career trajectory.

- Step 1* I worked for company N for a year. Then I worked for company U for three years, company P for three years, my own company for two years, company H for 2.5 years and now I have returned to my own company.
- Step 2* My interest and orientation are to work for my own company. I do not want to work for other companies for too long. When people need it, I may work temporarily for them for money or/and relationships. My company still operates normally during that period.

Insert Figure 2a here

Conversely, participant 2 changed employment status several times before he settled for hybrid self-employment. He (male, thirties, more than 3.5 years of self-employment) described different push and pull dynamics of self-employment mobility. Figure 2b illustrates the mobility track of participant 2. Below are his narratives about his career trajectory.

- Step 1* When I worked as an Air Controller, I felt it was so monotonic...I engaged in other business activities such as insurance and travel to accumulate experience...
- Step 2* My friend and I set up a communication company. The company was closed after three years because of intolerable differences among the management team.
- Step 3* I've just run this company for eight months. I still work in aviation but have been transferred to another department.

Insert Figure 2b here

Participant 9 (male, twenties, more than 3.5 years of self-employment) started as a self-employed careerist but was attracted to paid employment to learn how to manage a business effectively. Figure 2c illustrates the mobility track of participant 9. Below is a narrative from this participant about his career trajectory.

I plan to apply to work for a big company in this city... I think that self-employed candidates will have more advantages than new graduates. Self-employment makes us more experienced, grown up, motivated and self-directed. Recruiters tend to need us for higher positions than just entry ones.

Insert Figure 2c here

Participant 12 moved back and forth between paid and hybrid employment. Figure 2d illustrates the mobility track of participant 12 (male, forties, more than 3.5 years of self-employment). It shows his status from paid employment to hybrid employment back to paid management and then back to hybrid management. Steps involved various push and pull forces; below are narratives from this participant about his career trajectory.

- Step 1* My initial major was in Traffic Construction Technology. I started my full-time employment in 1995 and worked with foreign partners. I learnt from their expertise and management experience. My friend and I opened a Traffic Construction Company as, at that time, we were leading experts in this area.
- Step 2* The company, nevertheless, was closed because none of us was whole-heartedly committed to the company. I continued my full-time jobs and was in charge of different managerial positions.
- Step 3* I resigned after eight years because of intolerable pressures. I moved to another state-owned company and left after several months because of the misfit. I set up my own traffic construction consultancy company, carried out different temporary paid jobs, and supported my wife to run a commerce and transport service.

Insert Figure 2d here

The attractiveness of both home and host organizations, entrepreneurial calling, self-employment motivations such as autonomy, financial reward, and creating social wealth are

pulling factors of the mobility, mediating by career self-management (learning and self-direction). On the contrary, host organizations' unattractiveness and unsupportive business partners represent push factors of the mobility.

Established self-employment

The established self-employment group comprises 12 interviewees who managed their own business for three years or more. Career dynamics of those established participants are reflected by the mobility patterns of participants 3, 4, 6, and 20. Participants 3 and 20 were either pulled to or were purposeless to physically inward self-employment mobility. Participant 4 started as a self-employment careerist and did not engage in any mobility outside his company. Participants 6 encountered difficulties in the hybrid mode of self-employment, and then concentrated on self-employment after failure in the hybrid mode.

The majority of these participants were pulled to self-employment. During their start-up, they encounter difficulties (e.g., bankruptcy), and were consequently pushed to career mobility. One participant reported that she was purposeless to self-employment. They showed that the motivations for self-employment could be manufacturing, life-work congruence, financial reward, autonomy, family-inherited business, or business development. Some experienced entrepreneurial calling while others experienced occupational calling. They managed their self-employment career via different activities such as problem-solving, networking, operations, learning, and self-direction. They encountered threats, such as home organization's challenge or critical incidents in their host organization, as well as opportunities, such as bullish market or family support.

Figure 3a illustrates the mobility track of participant 3 (male, twenties, more than 3.5 years of self-employment). It shows his status from paid employment to self-employment,

and how the steps he took involved push and pull forces. Below is a narrative from this participant about his career trajectory.

After graduation, I conveniently applied for different jobs as the chance for financial management is slim. I then was offered a job at an online marketing company. I liked that job and worked there for three years, my first and only paid job so far.

Insert Figure 3a here

Figure 3b illustrates the mobility track of participant 4 (male, thirties, more than 3.5 years of self-employment). It shows his status from self-employment to self-employment, and how the steps he took involved non-outward self-employment mobility. Below is a narrative from this participant about his career trajectory.

During the first two years of my business, I incurred a major loss. Thanks to my reputation, my business partners allowed me to buy on credit. I began again and, after four years, I started to earn profit and I have just entered into a new business area.

Insert Figure 3b here

Figure 3c illustrates the mobility track of participant 6 (male, thirties, more than 3.5 years of self-employment). It shows the participant's status from paid employment to paid and self-employment to self-management, and these steps involved various push and pull forces. Below are narratives from this participant about his career trajectory.

Step 1 I started as an employee although I aimed to become an entrepreneur. Running a successful business requires favorable individuals and contextual factors. You need to increase your competence and accumulate necessary resources, or you will end up in failure.

... I worked in Danang for two months and my mom was ill. We moved to Hanoi to get good treatment for my mom. I worked in the Marketing Department for Corporation A for six months, then was promoted to Head of Marketing Department for six months, then to Regional Business Manager. After two years, I returned to Danang because it was the right time to leave that job.

... I fitted well with every organization. I never felt a misfit. I did not have time to care

about the fit. I just focussed on outperforming. I became the sale person with the second highest revenue after six months working for company D. After another six months, I became the sales person with highest revenue. My co-workers wondered why my boss rewarded me with a new laptop. I knew that he understood my effort to go beyond his expectations.

Step 2 During my time at company D, my friends and I opened this company. However, we failed because of our dispersion. I incurred a big debt to keep the brand of the company. Thinking positively, I started again with two tables and two chairs. This failure was one of my hardest lessons. My previous employer suggested that I should return to his company with a high salary but I did not. Start-up is very challenging.

Insert Figure 3c here

Figure 3d illustrates the mobility track of participant 20 (female, twenties, more than 3.5 years of experience). It shows her status from paid employment to self-employment, and the steps she took involved various push and pull forces. Below is a narrative from participant 20 about her career trajectory.

My main reason for leaving my previous job was that my parents did not want me to go on tour because I had no time for family. Besides, I was not passionate about being a tour operator. Then my parents opened a restaurant for me to manage.

Insert Figure 3d here

Career mobility of self-employment within ecosystem

Taking these three groups together, five main forces of self-employment dynamics are identified: self-employment motivation, calling, career self-management, institution, and society factors. The three former forces reflect the role of the individual career actor in the mobility of self-employment while the latter two forces confirm the role of institutions and other environments as determinants of self-employment mobility. In most of the cases, individual factors and favorable institutional and societal factors act as pull forces (move *towards*). In contrast, unfavorable institutional and societal factors act as push forces (move *away*). These five forces are visualized in Figure 4.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Discussion and conclusions

This study is unique in exploring multiple pathways that people embark on when moving between paid employment and self-employment on their way to self-employment. Building on the career ecosystem framework, we offer a meaningful interpretation of our findings. The interpretation, in turn, makes several key contributions to both career and entrepreneurship literature and opens up an avenue for further research in the field. The findings and discussions also carry several implications for governments, employers, HR practitioners, career counselors, and individuals.

Theoretical contributions

We expand career theory by comprehensively explaining career mobility from various trajectories to self-employment. By taking into account different participants at different stages of self-employment we demonstrate different pathways to self-employment career. For example, the trial self-employment group members show that they are pulled to either physical or psychological mobility (Sullivan and Arthur 2006). Moving between organizations, participants enriched their human and financial capital, and prepared for their actual or proposed start-up. Some people are both pushed and pulled to psychological self-employment mobility; others are forced to re-enter paid employment. However, self-employment exit and paid employment entry do not end the self-employment career. Instead, participants considered these periods as learning opportunities. Our findings, hence, provide empirical evidence of and explanation for related theoretical concerns of previous self-employment scholars (Burton et al. 2016; Lévesque, Shepherd and Douglas 2002). We also

expand the concept of *Career Calling* (Hall and Chandler 2005; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz 1997).

Second, by presenting multiple push and pull forces that lead to the dynamics of self-employment mobility, this study opens new venture for thinking of the relatedness between self- and paid employment (Burton et al. 2016). For example, in this study, ‘calling’ is reflected by occupational calling and entrepreneurial calling. While the former closely relates to paid employment, the latter is linked to self-employment. The transition from occupational to entrepreneurial calling, and vice versa, offers a starting point for future research.

Lastly, integrating the individual motivations, calling, and career self-management, we provide empirical evidence of what self-employed careerists bring to the career ecosystem, thus providing supporting evidence to this new theory (Baruch 2015; Baruch and Rousseau 2019). The motivations, callings and individual career practices represent pull forces of the career mobility dynamics (Hofstetter and Rosenblatt 2017). Apart from these pull factors, self-employment mobility is also influenced by institutional and societal actors through both push and pull forces. Home and host organizations may have different levels of attractiveness (development and fulfilment) or alienation (demotivation and laid-off) that self-employment participants are attracted to or moved away from (Dawson and Henley 2012). In addition, family, business partners and the market can either support or constrain the self-employment pathway, in line with Dawson and Henley (2012). Systematically, the combined forces result in different nuances of self-employment dynamics.

Managerial implications

This study offers several managerial implications at the individual, institutional, and societal levels. For instance, the findings may raise individuals’ and managers’ awareness that individuals’ motivation and self-management are the key influencers of both self- and paid

employment. Thus, it may be beneficial for individuals, particularly young people, to engage in effective interventions and practices that enhance one's autonomy and self-determination. In terms of institutions, it is necessary to differentiate between HR strategies and practices to assure effective investment in human capital. As start-up is increasingly popular in the current business context, it is more likely that proactive employees may leave to start their own business. People who exit self-employment may (re)enter organizations after their business crisis or challenge. In order to maximize the contribution of these current and prospective employees, HR and organizational career management activities such as empowerment, delegation, training and development should be offered. Regarding the role of governments and career counselors in the dynamics of self-employment mobility, it is critical to provide a realistic assessment of the push and pull forces of self-employment.

Limitations and suggested future research

Earlier works tend to focus on the positive dynamics of self-employment mobility. We offer a balanced perspective by also covering the dark side of self-employment (Baruch and Vardi 2016). Yet, our investigation is limited to people who continue their self-employment, not those who exited self-employment. If such participants are included in future research, this may reflect circumstances in which push forces outweigh pull forces of self-employment dynamics. In addition, given the data saturation and the interpretive phenomenology approach, we are at risk of not covering all aspects of continuous self-employment. Therefore, our findings should be interpreted with caution in relation to other contexts. Also, entirely reliant on the participants' interviews, we do not objectively examine the influences of factors at the macro and meso levels. Thus, a longitudinal study drawing from several sources of information will yield a more holistic picture of the dynamics of mobility.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Codebook of the qualitative analysis

Code	Explanation	Code	Explanation
<i>Self-employment stage</i>		<i>Calling</i>	
Trial stage	Involves intended and new self-employed participants who are preparing for and embarking on their self-employment	Occupational calling	Great passion and engagement with an occupation
Established stage	Involves hybrid and established participants who are exploring and expanding	Entrepreneurship calling	Great passion and engagement with entrepreneurship
<i>Self-employment motivation</i>		<i>Career self-management</i>	
Autonomy	Being independent and controlling of the whole process	Learning	
Financial reward	Getting good income	Capital mobilization	
Producing	Making, creating one's own product(s)	Problem-solving	
Business development	Setting, running and developing a business system or an organization	Networking and operating	
Creating social wealth	Contributing to the prosperity of community	Self-direction	
<i>Institutions</i>		<i>Mobility</i>	
Home organization	One's own organization	Physical mobility	Actual movement
Host organization	Employed organization	Psychological mobility	Preparation stage of the mobility
<i>Society</i>		Inward self- or paid employment mobility	Entering self- or paid employment
Market	Competition, opportunities, supply and demand of the market	Outward self- or paid employment mobility	Exiting self- or paid employment
Family	Career orientation and determination, career support, family care responsibilities		
Business partners	Co-founders of the organizations and other stakeholders		

Table 2. Push/pull forces of the dynamics of self-employment mobility

Theme	Sub-theme	Force	Quotation
<i>Self-employment motivation</i>	Autonomy	Pull	Participant 9: I don't want to work for other people but to work for myself. I prefer flexible working hours. I may work intensively for 15 hours per day. But I may also spend the whole day going out with my friends. Participant 24: I dream to be an entrepreneur. I like an active, free and self-controlled working environment.
	Financial reward		Participant 4: How could I get good income if I work for other people? I am not rich but better than many waged employees. Participant 32: Apart from this full-time employment, I also cooperate with my friend to manage our small textile factory. We need to do everything to earn money for our children.
	Producing		Participant 8: When I graduated, I did not think that I would work for a company. I wanted to make my own products.
	Business development		Participant 28: I am not sure that this job is absolutely suitable for me but I really love it. I have a passion for cooking. I don't want to change my job because this is the only one that I've ever pursued. My ultimate goal is to open a small restaurant with and then expand it into a larger one.
	Creating social wealth		Participant 29: I was born in a remote area. My parents were too busy and poor; thus, after school, I planted vegetables, raised buffalo and played with friends. Since I was in the ninth grade, I have oriented toward business consultancy. Money is not my first priority but rather contribution to the prosperity of society. Participant 15: Only when lecturers like us have first-hand exposure to business activities are we able to provide students with different directions. ... I want to run my own business so as to inspire my students' self-employment spirit.
<i>Calling</i>	Occupational calling	Pull	Participant 10: Being a journalist is my dream, my love. However, at this stage, I need further advancement and development and to prepare for my future business. Participant 26: I have loved this job since my early apprenticeship. Maybe because I love beauty and this beauty industry has chosen me. I like to be creative and always want to create new things such as new hair or nail styles to satisfy customers. I can perform this job well because of my passion. I find this job perfectly suited to me because I never feel tired or depressed with it. In contrast, I am always excited about this job.
	Entrepreneurial calling		Participant 6: I have been obsessing about finding my mission for life since I was young. I quit

			<p>my undergraduate study at Transport and Traffic University without any specific reason. I just felt that I did not belong to that area and I wanted to start something different. Then, I began again with the University of Economics. I love doing business.</p> <p>Participant 12: Earning money is my nature. I cannot stop thinking of making money.</p>
<i>Career self-management</i>	Learning	Pull	<p>Participant 1: In any organization, we can learn many things from the bright side to the dark side. I learn from everyone.</p> <p>Participant 5: During the implementation process, I realized that I need to acquire sufficient operational knowledge and experience for my future business.</p> <p>Participant 13: I often start with an area that I do not have experience in. I then learn gradually and follow a trial and error approach. When I was in charge of training activities of the software company, I was just a beginner and then became a senior one and advanced to higher positions. During the process, I've drawn my own lessons for my current organization. There is no common formulation for success. Hence, we need to be determined.</p>
	Capital mobilization		<p>Participant 22: I am maintaining and performing my jobs at two different centers. I am accumulating experience and capital in order to open my own English center. It is not easy to run my own center. I need to have time to conduct market research, to learn how to establish and run the center. After all, I believe that I will be able to make it.</p>
	Problem-solving		<p>Participant 23: I've never thought that I'll give up my job. Giving up is the easiest way out that people usually take. I rarely depend on my friends. If it's my personal problem, I will solve it by myself. If I cannot solve my own problem, no one else can. We need to own our life. To eliminate potential risk, I need to know how to make a scenario plan and propose different alternatives. I need to be flexible in every situation and think of prevention solutions.</p> <p>Participant 14: I started up when I was a second-year undergraduate student. However, my management competence at that time was not good enough. Most of my business failure was because I made bad decisions. During the first 10 years, I encountered finance, HR, organizing, products, market problems. I overcame those failures thanks to my will, not money. So far, I have made many adjustments in terms of business line and opened another company.</p>
	Networking and operation		<p>Participant 25: The restaurant was opened smoothly and I feel very happy. I have built good relationships with loyal customers. The volume of tourism in Danang has increased significantly, resulting in busy work.</p>
	Self-direction		<p>Participant 15: I am quite adaptive. If I make a mistake, I will try to fix it. If I can't fix it, I will quit and start a new thing. I do not want to be prepossessed by my failure but do think ahead.</p> <p>Participant 12: I always know what I want. Ideas and voices of others are secondary.</p>
<i>Institution factor</i>	Host-organization attractiveness	Pull	<p>Participant 7: I work here to accumulate experience; then I will change. This job is interesting and may pave the way for my future career path. I also have my own team to run my own</p>

			business. Participant 35: Apart from my full-time job, I also worked for outside projects in order to increase my savings. Although commuting between construction sites is tiring, it helps me meet new people; learn from their experience to benefit my entrepreneurial intention.
	Home-organization challenge and host organization attractiveness	Pull	Participant 9: When I first ran this coffee shop, I realized that my organizing, structuring, and interpersonal skills needed to be improved. I should learn from other established organizations. They spent several decades to build up their organization; why do I need to spend an equivalent amount of time if I could learn from them?
	Home-organization attractiveness	Pull	Participant 29: I always want to build a workplace in which I can apply new and advanced ideas.
	Host-organization unattractiveness	Push	Participant 7: At the beginning, I shared the same vision as my previous organization. However, we could not keep the same direction at some point. I felt demotivated and worked freelance for other jobs. Then, they thought that I didn't concentrate but they didn't figure out why I worked for someone else as well. And I left. Participant 13: My previous employer focussed on outsourcing for foreign companies, which demotivated me. As I had lived abroad for a long time, I wanted to have Vietnamese-made products. Participant 17: I graduated in 2001 and worked as an admin staff. I was made redundant three years ago and opened this restaurant.
<i>Societal factor</i>	Market	Push	Participant 5: The business was not as promising as I had thought.
		Pull	Participant 18: In 2004, in this city there were only 4 to 5 printing companies. Catching this opportunity, I resigned from my state-owned organization and opened this manufactory. Participant 30: When I quit my paid job and entered the market, I realized that there are many opportunities for doing many things.
	Family	Pull	Participant 5: My family has farming land in the countryside. I want to use it for my agricultural start-up. Participant 25: My parents grant me full authority to manage this restaurant. As it is a part of my family asset, I am improving myself so as to inherit my family business.
		Push	Participant 27: My child will start school soon. Therefore, I want to look for a job in another place with higher income. My husband and I also want to save money to open a small restaurant.
	Friends and business partners	Pull	Participant 30: My business karma came when I met Ms T, a business partner of my employer. We recognized a high demand for plant pots and set up our business.
		Push	Participant 2: I and my friends set up a communication company. The company was closed after three years because of intolerable differences among the management team.

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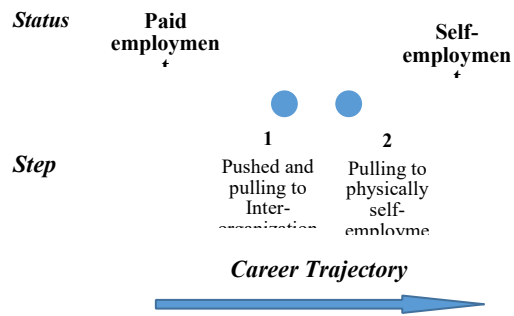


Figure 1a. Mobility track of Participant 11

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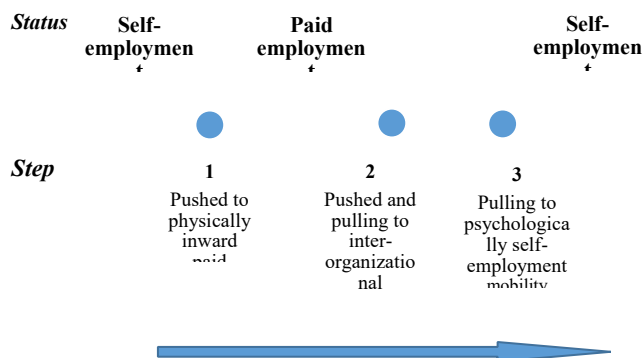


Figure 1b. Mobility track of Participant 5

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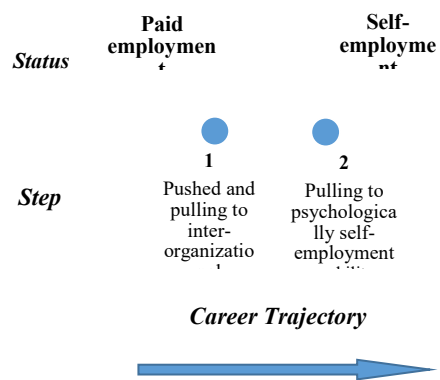


Figure 1c. Mobility track of Participant 16

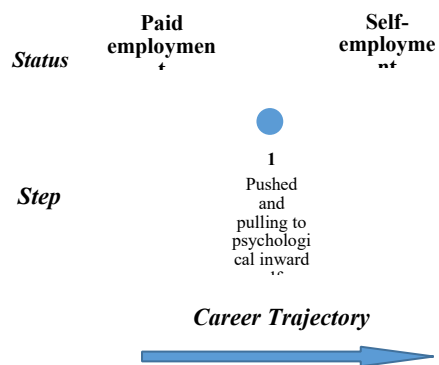


Figure 1d. Mobility track of Participant 21

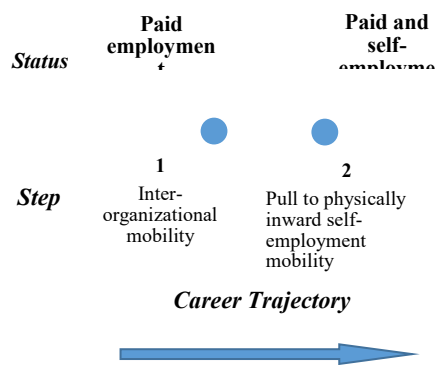


Figure 2a. Mobility track of Participant 32

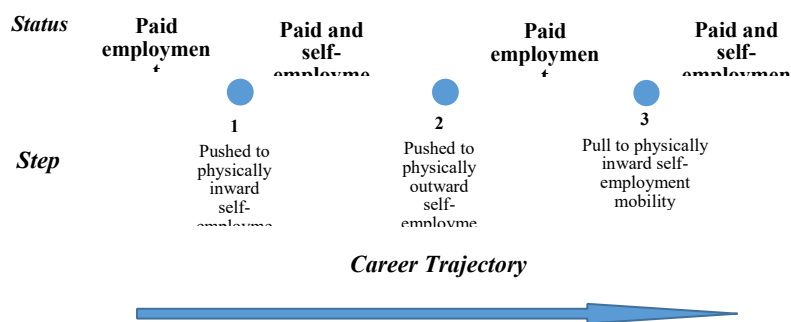


Figure 2b. Mobility track of Participant 2

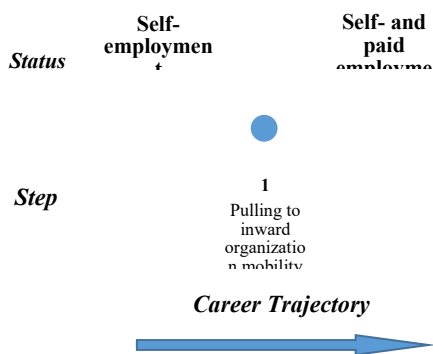


Figure 2c. Mobility track of Participant 9

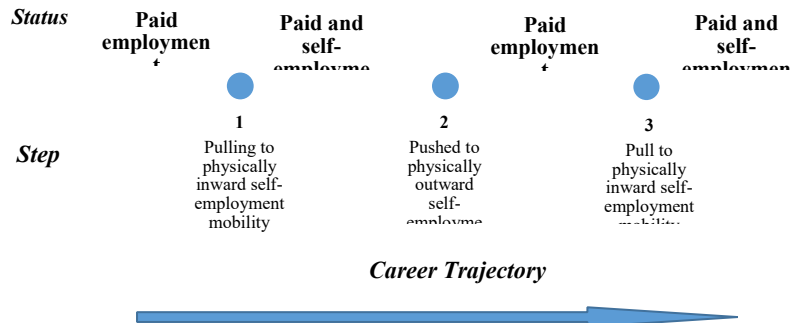


Figure 2d. Mobility track of Participant 12

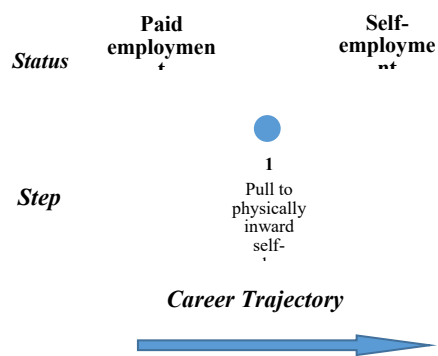


Figure 3a. Mobility track of Participant 3

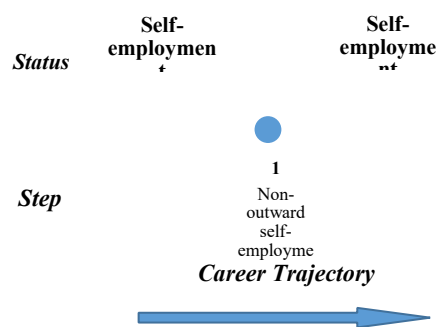


Figure 3b. Mobility track of Participant 4

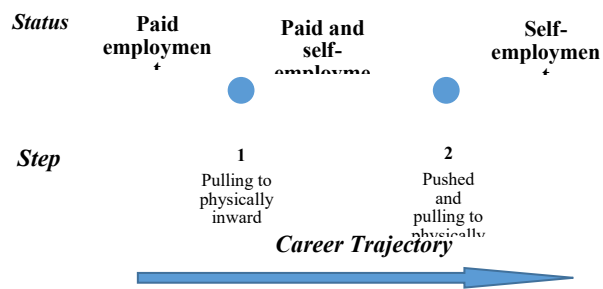


Figure 3c. Mobility track of Participant 6

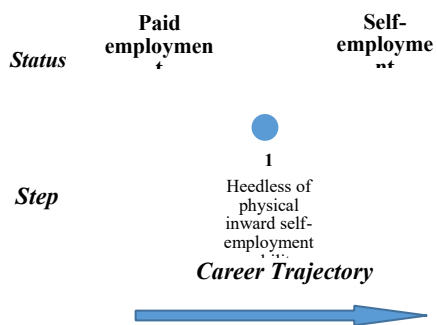


Figure 3d. Mobility track of Participant 20

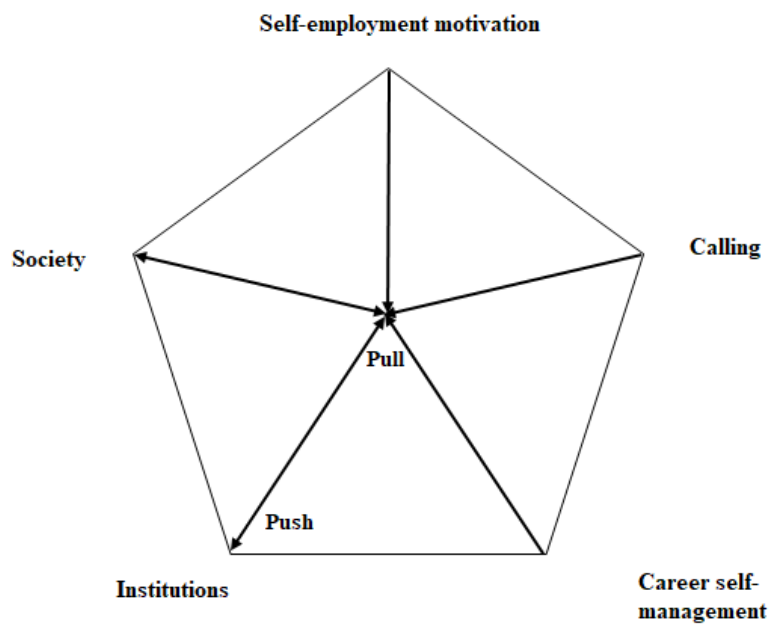


Figure 4. Five forces model of self-employment mobility